



Positive Discourse Analysis of Diplomatic Speeches from a Transitivity Perspective—A Case Study of the 2024 International Situation and China's Diplomacy Symposium Speech

及物性视角下外交演讲的积极话语分析——以 2024 年国际形势与中国外交研讨会演讲为例

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Abstract— This paper uses Foreign Minister Wang Yi's speech at the 2024 Symposium on International Situation and China's Diplomacy as the corpus to explore the representation of discourse in diplomatic speeches and its positive implications through a combination of transitive systems and positive discourse analysis. The study found that the materiality process in speeches is dominated by the material process, followed by the relational process and the verbal process. The psychological process and the behavioral process use less significant distribution characteristics. The material process strengthens the persuasiveness and appeal of the discourse by emphasizing the effectiveness of actions, while the relational process and the verbal process build the consensus of national identity and values and jointly shape China's image as a responsible major country. The study reveals that diplomatic discourse achieves the unity of the practicality and affinity of foreign policy through linguistic representation, providing a new perspective for analyzing the linguistic features of diplomatic discourse and the construction of national image.



Keywords— Transitivity, Positive discourse analysis, Diplomatic speech

I. INTRODUCTION

Diplomatic speech, as an important component of

diplomatic activities, is an important communication discourse for a country's external exchanges. It plays a

crucial role not only in conveying diplomatic ideas and positions but also in shaping the country's image. According to Li (2003), a political speech is a speech delivered on national affairs and diplomatic relations aimed at promoting propositions, expressing attitudes and positions, and a diplomatic speech is one of them, where national leaders can clearly express their policies and positions, thereby building and maintaining their image on a global scale. Positive Discourse analysis (PDA), proposed by J. R. Martin in 1999, emphasizes the positive and affirmative elements in discourse to guide readers with positive ideas and create a harmonious society (Zhu, 2006). Since then, research on PDA has been on the rise in China, especially showing its importance in the process of building a harmonious society. In the three-dimensional model of "power - identity - discourse" for the construction of diplomatic image, the concept of flexible diplomacy is proposed, emphasizing the use of "soft power" to go beyond the binary opposition of Western soft and hard power and demonstrate the social connotation of peace and responsibility of major powers (Ye, 2023). This model emphasizes the core role of diplomatic discourse in the construction of the national image, echoing the core idea of PDA, which is to promote the positive construction of the national image through the practice of positive discourse. Existing studies have mostly explored transitive systems from the perspectives of ecolinguistics and critical discourse analysis, but in the field of diplomatic speech discourse, research from the combined perspective of transitive and positive discourse analysis is still insufficient. This study aims to reveal in depth how transitive processes and participants in diplomatic speeches work together to construct positive meaning, providing a new perspective for understanding the discourse characteristics of diplomatic speeches and international communication.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Research related to physical property systems

Systemic functional linguistics holds that language has three purely rational functions: conceptual, interpersonal, and discourse. The empirical function is an important component of the conceptual function, referring to how people express their thoughts, beliefs, feelings, etc.

about the subjective and objective world through language, focusing on the proposition "content" of the message. Transitive systems reveal semantic relationships between various processes and the participants and environmental components they require. It is the most important semantic system for representing empirical functions (Huang, 2002). Most of the existing research focuses on the analysis of objectional systems from the perspective of ecolinguistics, exploring the positive international ecological image of responsibility, commitment and action reflected in the diplomatic speeches and statements of leaders through the analysis of international ecological discourse (Xu & Gao, 2023). The dominant beneficial discourse indicates that China is committed to establishing a good international community ecological discourse system and promoting the sound development of the international community ecosystem (Zhang & Han, 2021). And some studies combined the perspective of temporality and ecological discourse analysis to investigate the ecological consciousness contained in educational discourse and the implementation of ecological education in teaching practice (Yu & Wang, 2020), the empirical function of poetry translation (Huang, 2002), and the ecological view of "harmony between man and nature" in the English translation of pastoral poetry (Chen, 2019). The ecological language characteristics of different fields and genres, such as the ecological orientation of domestic and foreign media news reports (Yuan, 2018; Sun & Guo, 2022). Furthermore, some scholars have focused their analysis on the social and cultural dimensions that constitute discourse, interpreting the generation mechanism of discourse from the perspective of social practice and using critical discourse to analyze the image of China constructed in foreign media reports (Cao & Zhao, 2019). The economic inequality reflected in discourse changes in mainstream British media such as *The Guardian* and the *Daily Mail* (Gomez-Jimenez & Bartley, 2023) and the African national anthem constructed negative images of colonizers and positive images of Africans through temporality structure and lexical choice, Emphasizing themes of freedom and land ownership (Mwinlaaru & Nartey, 2022). It can be seen that the current focus on the empirical function of language in representing the world is on the six major process analyses of transitive systems, and the

research perspective mostly starts from critical discourse analysis and ecological discourse analysis, combined with discourse such as speeches, textbooks, news reports, national anthems and poetry translations, to explore the discourse characteristics, ecological consciousness and image construction reflected in different styles and fields. There is a lack of exploration of the integration of transitive systems with other discourse analysis models, and there is insufficient attention to China's discourse in diplomatic Settings in the international community and the image of a major power it reflects.

2.2 Research related to positive discourse analysis

Positive discourse analysis (PDA) was proposed by J.R.Martin in 1999, and "hopeful discourse" has increasingly drawn the attention of many scholars (Yang & Zhao, 2018), moving from critical discourse analysis that focuses on "critical thinking" to more positive and affirmative directions, guiding readers with positive ideas, To create a beautiful and harmonious world. There are studies on the construction of national consciousness in news commentary from the perspective of positive/critical discourse analysis, which integrates the positive and critical discourse analysis framework and analyzes the critical attitude and praise in commentary from the attitude resource subsystem of evaluation theory (Qiu, 2024), and most studies start from evaluation theory and combine the positive discourse analysis model. Not only focused on image construction in news reports on various topics (Qian, Rob, 2016), but also explored attitude resources in the English translation of white papers (Yang & Cai, 2024), national image in the English translation of government work reports (Wang & Chen, 2024), and evaluation resources in diplomatic speeches and diplomatic discourse (He, 2021; Jiang, 2024) et al., it can be found that the scope and text of these studies on positive discourse analysis focus on news reporting and political discourse, and combine positive discourse analysis more with evaluation theory or attitude subsystems to analyze the interpersonal rational function of language influencing other people's behavior and how these attitude resources construct national image and convey positive meaning.

At present, an increasing number of studies are beginning to adopt a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis methods, using large-scale corpus data

for in-depth research to reflect the self-shaping and other shaping of the national image in order to obtain a more comprehensive research perspective. Less often, transitive systems are combined with positive discourse analysis, although some scholars have noted the connection between transitive analysis of positive discourse analysis and the city image in news reports (Lu & Duan, 2024) and the national image in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative and language security in foreign reports (Chen & Chen, 2023), Less attention has been paid to the study of diplomatic discourse, especially diplomatic speech discourse, and there is a lack of exploration of the combination of transitive systems and the construction of positive meaning. Diplomatic speeches are mainly about conveying information, being objective and straightforward, and often expressing positions and attitudes in a declarative tone. Through positive discourse analysis and transitivity analysis, the actors in each process of diplomatic speeches and their roles and responsibilities can be revealed, thereby gaining insights into the process of national identity construction. This study aims to explore the distribution of various processes in the transitive system of diplomatic speeches and the information conveyed by the actors as the basis for language to describe the subjective and objective world and to construct positive meanings.

III. THEORETICAL BASIS

3.1 And physical property systems

By deconstructing the process meaning potential of human real-world experiences, the transitive system reveals semantic relationships among the three core components of process, participant, and environmental component. This system is the most important semantic representation tool for the function of experience, providing theoretical support and methodological framework for studying how human experience is expressed through language. In transitive systems, human experience is deconstructed into six basic types of processes, namely the material process, the mental process, the relational process, the behavioral process, the verbal process and the existential process. Each type of process is associated with specific semantic functions and the construction of real experiences. Participants and

environmental components are closely associated with the process. Participants are the main dominators of the transitive process and determine the meaning direction of the process; Environmental components provide background information about the process, describing the specific context of the process in terms of time, space, or other conditions. Therefore, transitive property analysis requires a comprehensive study of the selection of processes, participants, and environmental components in order to reveal systematic relationships among them.

3.2 Positive Discourse analysis

Unlike the exposure and criticism of critical discourse analysis, positive discourse analysis is based on praise and construction, advocating that discourse analysis should adopt a positive and friendly attitude to analyze discourse and strive to promote the building of a relaxed, conciliatory, and coexisting human society through discourse analysis (Zhu, 2006). Positive discourse analysis is concerned with discourse on major national or international issues such as diplomacy, mediation, negotiation, conference and consultation, and the Foreign minister's speech at the symposium on international situation and China's diplomacy has a strong logical similarity to the path and vision of positive discourse analysis. When Zhang Delu and Zhang Ke (2022) proposed the comprehensive framework of multimodal positive discourse analysis, they noted that the analytical framework of positive discourse, on the one hand, implants the framework of discourse analysis in systemic functional linguistics on the basis of critical discourse analysis, and on the other hand, it also has multimodal characteristics, highlighting the role of socio-cultural factors in interpretation, that is, highlighting the goals of positive discourse analysis.

Positive discourse analysis advocates for a "multifunctional" analytical approach that takes into account empirical, interpersonal, and discourse functions. The current academic community mainly uses evaluation theory as the research framework for positive discourse analysis, often focusing on the interpersonal meaning of discourse and to some extent ignoring the complementarity of empirical and interpersonal functions (Hu, 2012). Transitive systems are the main representation of empirical functions and the presentation of meaning in small

sentences. The exploration of positive discourse analysis based on transitive systems by exploring the author's cognition of the subjective and objective world, interpreting conceptual meaning, and using socio-cultural cognitive models to explain the positive meaning constructed by language tools is of great significance for the improvement and development of positive discourse analysis methods.

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Corpus sources

The corpus for this study is selected from the full text of the speech delivered by Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the 2024 International Situation and China's Diplomacy Symposium in Beijing. The speech text, as an important part of the country's diplomatic discourse, is highly representative and typical, reflecting both China's diplomatic stance and policy propositions and demonstrating the country's sense of responsibility and positive image in international affairs. Based on a small corpus of about 18,405 symbols, totaling 16,968 characters, the speech text was divided into small sentences as the basic analysis units, and detailed transitive analysis and positive discourse analysis were conducted through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Specifically, this study uses UAM Corpus Tool 6.0 software to label and classify the corpus sentence by sentence, statistically analyze the process type distribution characteristics of the short sentences in the speech, and in combination with the semantic functions of the participants and environmental components, explore the role of different process types and their actors' roles and responsibilities in the construction of positive meaning. Based on the transitive theory framework of systemic functional linguistics, this study explores the diplomatic image and positive meaning conveyed through language practice.

4.2 Research Questions

This study focuses on Foreign Minister Wang Yi's participation in the 2024 International Situation and China Diplomacy Symposium in Beijing under the title "*Riding the Trend of the Times with A Strong Sense of A Strong Sense of Responsibility*". This study combined quantitative and qualitative analysis of the short sentences from the

speech “Responsibility” aimed at answering the following questions:

- (1)What are the overall distribution characteristics of the process types in short sentences in speeches?
- (2) What are the representations and positive implications of each process type in the speech?

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After multiple manual annotations and quantitative statistics on the target Corpus using UAM Corpus Tool 6, the distribution of physical process types in the full text of Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s speech at the 2024 Symposium on International Situation and China’s Diplomacy in Beijing was obtained (see Table 1).

Table 1 Overall Distribution of Transitive process types

Process types	Frequency	Frequency (%)
Type of substance	269	70.1
Relationship Type	60	15.6
Speech processes	27	7.0
Mental processes	20	5.2
Behavioral processes	8	2.1
In total	384	100

The statistical results show that various process types appeared a total of 384 times in the foreign minister’s speech. Among them, the material process had the highest frequency, accounting for 70.1%, followed by the relational process, accounting for 15.6%. The verbal process and the psychological process appeared less frequently, accounting for 7.0% and 5.2% respectively. The behavioral process had the lowest frequency, accounting for only 2.1%. Material processes, as the core process type of the discourse, centrally reflect the description of specific behaviors and actions in the speech. This feature conforms to the common function of an annual diplomatic speech, which emphasizes action and results to enhance persuasiveness and practical appeal; More relational processes highlight China’s position and identity in the international community; The verbal process, which is used to quote and paraphrase conversations or speeches in diplomatic activities, is a necessary transitive process to enhance the authority and credibility of the content; Mental processes, which are mainly used to convey internal perceptions, emotions and

attitudes, are less common in diplomatic speeches because speeches are generally more focused on showing external behaviors and logical relationships and less on subjective feelings; Behavioral processes mainly involve specific physical actions, and the low-frequency use of behavioral processes is associated with the formality and functionality of the discourse. Diplomatic discourse, because it focuses on describing the macroscopic framework of action, rarely involves simple physical actions. Overall, the empirical significance of the foreign minister’s speech is mainly reflected through the material process, followed by the relational process, and relatively less in the verbal process and mental process, which are generally in line with the linguistic characteristics of the speech discourse at international conferences.

5.1 Analysis of material processes

A material process is a type of process that represents the process of doing something and describes the actual behavior and events in the real world. The actor who initiates the action is the actor, and the recipient of the action is the target. The material process features are prominent throughout the discourse. Through material sentences, the speech approaches from multiple perspectives such as diplomatic actions, economic development, regional cooperation, global governance and cultural exchange, and combines general description with examples to aim to objectively and comprehensively expounding the rich achievements and positive impacts of China’s diplomacy in 2024. The general description provides a global perspective and strategic framework, while the examples support the general proposition from different fields and cooperation dimensions with specific cases and data, making the content more objective, comprehensive and persuasive, reflecting the height and effectiveness of diplomatic speeches. Specific material processes such as: Working together to advance science and technology (Example 1), international logistics achievements (Example 2), promoting regional infrastructure construction (Example 3), etc. Abstract material processes frequently use “advance”, “promote”, “safeguard”, “build”, verbs with positive meanings, such as “make”, with their unique semantic characteristics, form a discourse picture of China’s participation in global governance. Among them, “make” and “build” are more

frequently used in the material process, with a combined usage rate of up to 9.11%. The targets are respectively efforts (made efforts) and a community (build a China-Brazil/China-Vietnam/China-Africa community). Whether at the negotiating table of addressing the global climate crisis or in the process of promoting international cooperation and national social building, “made efforts” vividly demonstrate China’s firm determination to fulfill its international responsibilities through concrete actions. The word “build” is used in conjunction with expressions such as “build a China-Brazil community”, “build a China-Vietnam community”, and “build a China-Africa community”. The expression “building a community” not only conveys China’s commitment to establishing deep cooperative relations with other countries and sharing the fruits of development, but also highlights the practical implementation of the sense of a community with a shared future for mankind in bilateral and multilateral cooperation. These verbs express a metaphorical or abstract sense of “action” or “outcome”, highlighting China’s initiative, sense of responsibility and global influence on the international stage.

Example 1: China worked with fellow Global South nations to jointly launch an Initiative on International Cooperation in Open Science.

Example 2: The China-Europe Railway Express has provided over 100,000 freight train services in total.

Example 3: The China-kyrgyz-uzbekistan railway project was signed.

In the material sentences of the speech, the author mainly uses “We”, “China’s diplomatic service” and “China” to reflect the subjective consciousness in China’s diplomacy. The use of this subject emphasizes the collectivity and practicality of China’s diplomacy, and through the community of “we” undertaking various international actions, it shows China’s active role as a responsible major country. The repeated use of “China’s diplomatic service” and “China” further indicates that China’s diplomatic practice is driven systematically and institutionally, representing an active diplomatic act at the national level. Furthermore, the actors of some material clauses are composed of noun phrases that China uses alongside other countries (Examples 2 and 3), in which China does not position itself as a leader or giver of

international affairs, but participates in the global development process as an equal partner. By jointly promoting major projects with other countries, China conveys to the world its determination to actively promote a fair, just and inclusive development order, and through specific cooperation projects, it transforms the concept of win-win cooperation into practical actions, presenting an image of an all-round practitioner and maintainer.

In general, the material process describes the concrete actions, covering a wide range of areas from domestic to international, from regional cooperation to global governance, demonstrating the practicality and pertinence of China’s diplomacy, not just remaining at the grand policy level, while demonstrating through multilateral cooperation that it is not a single driving force. Rather, it is an image of China’s diplomacy that is proactive, responsible and has a wide international influence.

5.2 Analysis of Relationship processes

Relational processes, which reflect the logical relationships between things, are divided into belonging and identification categories. Through the use of relational clauses, the speech, on the one hand, represents the background of events, the attributes of things and the identities of people, enhances the persuasiveness of the text and shapes China’s diplomatic identity; On the other hand, by defining the attributes of initiatives and China’s diplomatic actions, positive evaluations are made to build the image of a responsible major country. Example 4 fully embodies the categorical relationship clause, which clarifies “China’s” identity and attributes as “a force of unity in division and confrontation”, and by emphasizing China’s position, highlights China as an initiator and defender of international cooperation, providing a credible identity for the diplomatic initiative of jointly building the Belt and Road. By positioning China’s diplomatic role, it further emphasizes China’s responsibility and commitment in the international community and reinforces China’s image as an advocate of peace and cooperation. In characterizing evaluation and judgment, Example 5 presents an identity-type relational process that positions “China” as a “responsible major power” with “greater international influence”. Further reinforcing China’s central role in the Belt and Road Initiative and global governance through positive evaluation of its identity.

Example 4: China will be a firm force for unity in the face of division and confrontation.

Example 5: China today is already a responsible major country with enhanced international influence.

Example 6: It is the widely shared view that the building of a community with a shared future for mankind is an important vision

Furthermore, when the relational process represents the evaluation of attitudes, the relational clauses are mainly projected through the speech process in the form of speech content, and the speakers are mainly the international community (Zhou, 2024). The speech, through the verbalization of the relational process, highlights the positive significance and international influence of China's diplomatic values while avoiding the subjective intervention of the speaker, making the speech more objective and persuasive. In Example 6, the projection of the speech process, the main clause is "widely shared view", indicating the speech process. The content, "an important vision put forth by President Xi Jinping", projects evaluations of the initiative on building a community with a shared future for mankind. It showcases the significance of the initiative through the objective perspective of a third party, highlighting it as people's important vision, while avoiding subjective intervention from the speaker, thereby enhancing persuasiveness and demonstrating the global value of Xi Jinping's diplomatic thinking, promoting China's diplomatic positions.

In summary, the relational clauses in the text demonstrate China's initiative and constructive role in addressing global challenges, and further emphasize China's responsibility in the international community through the positioning and attributes of China's diplomatic role, reinforcing China's image as an advocate of peace and cooperation.

5.3 Analysis of Speech Process

The speech process is the process of exchanging information through speaking, and its participants include the speaker, the recipient and the content of the speech. Speakers include leaders and officials, official reports and experts and scholars, etc. In Minister Wang Yi's speech, the use of the speech process conveys a series of positive diplomatic and cooperative messages through the selection

of participants and the construction of the speech content. At the same time, it shows that China, as an advocate, has put forward the values of "openness and inclusiveness" in international cooperation. Example 8, by using the parallel author "China and Brazil", flexibly employs "the international community" or specific partners as the subject of speech, which is essentially an implicit strategy of identity construction. When referring to the results of cooperation and citing international organizations' evaluations of China's initiatives, these language expressions indirectly reinforce the universality and appeal of China's diplomatic ideas through the "other perspective". The participation and recognition of other countries and international organizations not only confirm the rationality of China's diplomatic strategy, but also build a three-dimensional image of China as a responsible major country in the global public opinion field and consolidate China's active position in international multilateral cooperation. It reflects China's equal attitude in international cooperation.

Example7: President Xi Jinping called for more open and inclusive Global South cooperation.

Example8: China and Brazil jointly issued the six-point consensus on political settlement of the Ukraine crisis.

It is evident that quoting and relaying the words or ideas of national leaders in foreign speeches demonstrates the highest decision-making power and leadership of China's leaders in diplomacy. Emphasizing China's consistent stance and deliberate seriousness in the face of cooperation initiatives, multilateral mechanisms, and global issues. By using "the international community" or partners, such as Brazil and ASEAN as common speakers, it indirectly expresses the recognition of China's initiatives and actions by other partners and speakers, demonstrating the equality, openness and inclusiveness of China's diplomacy and further consolidating China's active position on the international stage. With a deep grasp of international discourse and strategic thinking on the global governance pattern, it provides a strong discourse support for China's major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

The two psychological process verbs in Example 10 reflect the emotional connection, that is, through "cherish",

the humanistic care in diplomacy is conveyed, highlighting the emphasis on historical friendship, gratitude to partners, showing a willingness for long-term cooperation, and further strengthening China's image as a responsible major country that respects history and values partners. These processes essentially reflect the psychological responses of the cognitive subject (here the cognitive subject can be understood as the countries of the world, the international community, etc.) to the object (China's development, diplomatic practice, etc.), which are manifested in psychological activities such as expectations and identifiers, precisely reflecting the world's expectations of China and its recognition of the success of its development path. In this psychological process, "the world" acts as the Senser, "China's development path" as the Phenomenon, and the psychological activities of expectation and identification closely link the two, clearly indicating that China's global influence is achieving a significant increase. Psychological goal phenomena are mostly positive abstract concepts such as "friendship", "cooperation", "peace and development", highlighting the value orientation of diplomacy. The psychological processes with these concepts as phenomena highlight the value orientation of China's diplomacy centered on win-win cooperation and peaceful development, and reflect the positive signals and value guidance role that China's diplomacy conveys in promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

Example 9: He believes in a global response to global challenges.

Example 10 We cherish old friends who have contributed to the friendship between their countries and China and we value the commitment and input of people from various sectors to developing friendly ties with China.

Example 11: We have safely evacuated over 10,000 Chinese compatriots from overseas high-risk regions.

Specific action verbs are not prominent in the analysis of the process of action, but the specific action verb "evacuated" in example 11 indicates the act of evacuating people from dangerous areas. The behavioral process directly shows a distinct action. "we" refers to an actor of the Chinese government or diplomatic institution, a typical behavioral process that directly reflects specific diplomatic acts, showing the clear actions taken by the

Chinese government in ensuring the safety of its citizens and their actual effects, embodying the people first of the Chinese government, being pragmatic and efficient in times of crisis, It has also created an image of a great country that cares for its people and takes on international responsibilities at home and abroad.

VI. CONCLUSION

Based on Foreign Minister Wang Yi's speech at the 2024 Symposium on the International Situation and China's Diplomacy, this paper explores the distribution characteristics of the transitive process in diplomatic speeches and its role in the construction of positive meaning by combining transitive systems and positive discourse analysis methods. The research shows that the distribution of various process types in speeches has significant hierarchical characteristics: material processes are dominant, highlighting specific descriptions of actions and outcomes; Relational processes play a secondary role in characterizing identity, status, and context; The verbal process enhances the authority and credibility of the content by citing and paraphrasing; Mental and behavioral processes, though less frequent, play a significant role in presenting subjective emotions, attitudes, and specific behaviors.

The study found that diplomatic speeches emphasize China's specific practices in international affairs through material processes, including achievements in diplomatic actions, regional cooperation, global governance and cultural exchange, presenting China's international image as a responsible major country; Through the process of relations, it clarifies China's identity and position in the international community and conveys China's commitment to peace, development, equity and cooperation; The discourse process highlighted the voice and leadership of China's diplomatic leaders and strengthened the international community's recognition of China's initiatives and policies. The use of verbs such as "build", "promote", "advance" and other expressions with positive meanings in the speech further highlighted the initiative and sense of responsibility of China's diplomacy in promoting global peace and development.

Diplomatic speeches, as an important vehicle for shaping the country's image and disseminating policies,

have successfully constructed China's international image of "putting people first", "win-win cooperation" and "a responsible major country" through the selection of transitive processes and the expression of positive words. This discourse feature not only meets the functional requirements of diplomatic discourse, but also enhances the international persuasiveness and appeal of China's foreign policy. The study provides a new perspective for understanding the language practice in diplomatic speeches and the construction of the national image, and also offers a reference for the research approach that combines the transitive system of systemic functional linguistics with positive discourse analysis. However, this study still has certain limitations, such as a relatively concentrated corpus range and insufficient data sample size. Future studies can combine more different types of diplomatic discourse to further explore the construction of positive meaning in diplomatic discourse from the perspective of cross-context and multi-text.

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